CENTRAL STREET PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
Central Street over New Haven Railroad
Central Falls
Providence County
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-51

HAER
RI,
4-CENFA,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

CENTRAL STREET PEDESTRIAN VIADUCT

HAER
RI,
4-CENFA,
2-

HAER No. RI-51

Location: Cantral Straat ovar New Havan Railroad
Cantral Falls
Providanca County, Rhoda Island

USGS Quadrangla: Pawtuckat, RI-Mass. UTM: 19.302040.4639670

Engineer/Archltact: unknown

Fabricator: Boston Bridga Works

Date of Construction: 1915

Present Owner: National Railroad Passengar Corporation
60 Massachusatts Avenue N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Present Usa: not in service

Signiflcance: Tha Cantral Street Padastrian Viaduct is significant for its associations with historic improvaments mada by tha Naw York, Naw Havan and Hartford Railroad to thair right-of-way in Central Falls and Providanca, Rhoda Island. The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct is an unusual surviving example of a railroad footbridge.

Projact Informatlon: The National Railroad Passangar Corporation (Amtrak), in association with tha Fadaral Railroad Administration (FRA), is proposing a numbar of infrastructure projacts to upgrada tha Northeast Corridor Railroad right-of-way in Connacticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. In consultation with tha State Historic Prasarvation Officars (SHPOs), Amtrak and FRA hava datarminad that tha proposad "Northaast Corridor Improvamant Projact - Elactrification: Naw Haven, Connacticut to Boston, Massachusetts" project will have adverse Impacts on significant historic propartias. Thrae Mamoranda of Agraament outlining stipulations to aliminate, minimize, or mitigate advarse project impacts hava baan draftad by Amtrak, the FRA, and tha raspactiva SHPOs, and have baan acceptad by the Advisory Council on Historic Prasarvation. The stipulations includa tha racordation of the Central Straat Padastrlan Viaduct to Historic Amarican Enginaaring Racord standards.

The proposed projact will necessitate damolition of tha Cantral Street Pedestrian Viaduct. The Cantral Street Pedastrian Viaduct is eligible for inclusion in tha National Register of Historic Places for its associations with the New York, Naw Havan and Hartford Railroad, and it is also significant as an unusual surviving axampla of a railroad foot bridga.

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island was retained by ABB Environmental Services, Inc. on behalf of Amtrak and FRA to prepare HAER documentation for the Central Street Padestrian Viaduct. The report was compiled in April 1996 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian; Matthew A. Kierstead, Industriel Historian; end Joshua Safdie, Architecturel Assistent. The large format photogrephy wes completed in April 1996 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island.

Preparers: Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian
Matthew A. Kierstead, Industrial Historian

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.
210 Lonsdele Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Islend 02860

PART I DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct spans the Amtrak Northaast Corridor tracks at Milepost 190.07, where they cut Central Street one block north of the Cross Street overpass and three blocks north of the Central Falls-Pawtucket Railroad Station. The immediate area is densely developed with mixed ninetaenth- end twentieth-century commercial, industrial, and residential buildings.

The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct is a single-span, 10-panel, riveted plate-steel pony girder pedestrian viaduct supported by 10-foot by 6-foot, rectangular, riveted, steel lattice bents thet serve as stair towers. The west stairs descend to Railroad Street at a right angle to the bridge. The east stairs descend to the north at a right angle and then turn 65 degreea east to the head of Central Street. The pony girder spen is 60 feet 6 inches long, and the deck is 10 feet wide with 1B feet 8 inches of clearence to the top of the railroad track rail head. There is 50 feet 3 inches of horizontal clearance between the bents, which are braced with intersecting diagonal girders with rectangular gusaets and stand on concrete footings. The track span is joined to the bents by radiused girder brackets. The steps and landings are of poured-in-place concrete slebs with steel support substructure. The girder span originally included diamond-mesh wire screens, now missing, and the towers and stairs incorporated pipe railings with steel rod screens, now damaged or missing. Several original ornate finials survive on the square, coffered, cast-iron track span and stairway end poats. Ten riveted steel signel post catwalk brackets extend from the weat side of the north elevation of the track span. Due to the deterioration of the stairs and track spen deck, the viaduct is fenced off and closed to pedestrian traffic. For this reason, no views across the traffic level could be included with the photo documentation.

PART II HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct spens the National Reilroad Pessenger Corporation (Amtrak) Northeast Corridor, a high-speed passenger rail line that connects Boston, Massachusetts to New York City, Naw York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Washington, D.C. This route originally consisted of several pessenger and freight railroads with end-to-end-connections, which were consolidated into the Amtrek system in 1971. The segment of the Northeast Corridor that includes the Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct was originally chartered in 1B31 as the Boston and Providence, and with the Boston and Maine and the Boston and Worcester was one of the first three major railroads in New England. Construction began in 1B32, and in 1833 the railroad merged with several new Connecticut railroada to form the New York, Providence and Boston, or the "Stonington Road". The Boston to Providence segment thet includes the Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct was surveyed by Captain William Gibbs McNeill, noted railroed surveyor and uncle of the painter James McNeill Whistler. In 1B92 the Boston to New York line was included in the growing New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad (New Haven) aystem. Through rail connection to New York City was not realized until the Thames River at Groton, Connecticut was finally bridged in 1BB9 (Karr 1995:124-126, 147-14B).

The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct, constructed in 1915, is significant for its essociations with the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad and with Pawtucket and Central Falla during an important period of railroad expansion and the industrial growth of the two communities during the first 40 yeara of the twentieth century. The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct is evidence of the comprehenaive grade crossing elimination project undertaken in the Pawtucket area ca. 1912, and is an unusual surviving

example of a light-duty steel bridge erected for urban foot traffic.

In response to growing turn-of-the-century conflicts between railroads and expanding cities, railroads often elevated or depressed their rights-of-way, smoothing the flow of automobile traffic but creating barriers to foot traffic. As part of thase Progressive Era civic improvements, communities, industries, and the railroads themselves erected pedestrian bridges over busy rail lines and deep track cuts to insure safe and smooth passage for pedestrians. In 1912, the Pawtucket and Central Falls Grade Crossing Commission appointed by the State of Rhode Island proposed a realignment and depression of the railroad right-of-way through this densely industrialized and urbanized northeast corner of Rhode Island. This improvement included demolition of the Central Falls passenger station at Central Street and construction of a new passenger station serving both communities, located three blocks south of Central Street (Pawtucket-Central Falls Railroad Passenger Station, 1916, pending NR). Between 1915 and 1916, the roadbed was depressed end several small roads, including Central Street, were discontinued. New steel-and-concrete highway bridges were constructed over the tracks north and south of Central Street. The Grede Crossing Commission saw that the project would interfere with tha busy pedestrian traffic at the center of commercial activity at Broad and Central streets and proposed that a footbridge be constructed at Central Street (Tait 1995).

Of tha nine bridges that were part of this program, only two, the Conant Street Bridge (Milepost 189.24; closed to traffic) and the Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct (closed to pedestrians), both steel pony girder bridges, remain in their original yet deteriorated form. The Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct was the only footbridge included in the Pawtucket-Central Falls right-of-way improvement program.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Plans and Drawings

National Railroad Pessenger Corporation Design Department, 30th Street Station, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

B. Historic Views

None located

C. Bibliography

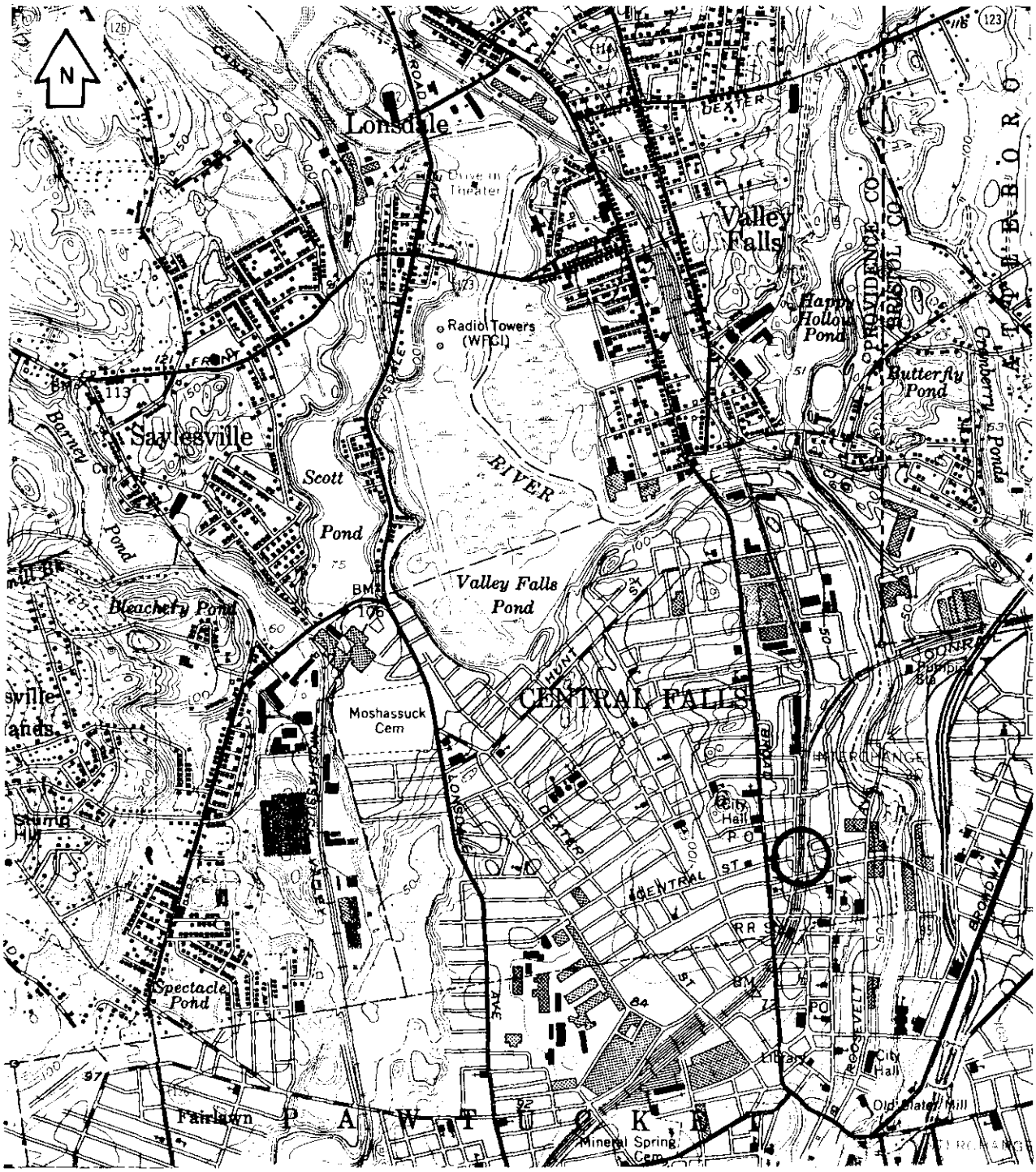
Kerr, Ronald Dala. The Rail Lines of Southern New England: A Handbook of Railroad History. Pepperell, Massachusetts: Branch Line Press, 1995.

Tait, Anne. Rhode Island Department of Transportation Historic Bridge Inventory Form for the Central Street Pedestrian Viaduct. Providence, Rhode Island: The Public Archeeology Laboratory, Inc., 1995.

D. Interviews

None conducted

Location Map



Source: USGS Quad: Pawtucket, RI-Mass.